Jesuit Relations, 1637 — “The One Master Above the Sky”

Source: Relation de ce qui s’est passé en la Nouvelle France, l’année 1637

Author: Paul Le Jeune, S.J.

Issued: Paris, 1638

Translation: Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents, Vol. 11 (Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., 1896)

> “The Montagnais have always believed that there is one Master of our lives who is above the Sky; they call Him Nitaoouendio.”
>
> I was astonished to hear this name, so near to our word Deus. I told them that it is He whom we adore, who made Heaven and Earth and all that is in them. They answered me that they have ever known that He created all things, and that He governs them still.
>
> They do not make images of Him, nor do they build temples, for they say the Sky itself is His dwelling. When they behold the great light of day, or the stars shining, they say, “That is the fire of the Master.”
>
> Some have asked me if the Sun be not His eye. I told them that the Sun is His creature, which gives light to the Earth, and that the Master Himself is far greater, though invisible to us.
>
> When I taught them of the coming of the Son of that Master, who took flesh and died to save men, they listened with attention. They said that they had heard from their forefathers that the Sky had once sent a man of great power, clothed in light, who spoke gently and healed the sick. They believed this was He of whom I spoke.
>
> These simple people recognize in their manner the law written in every heart. They have not the Scriptures, but they have remembrance of the Creator, as if the echo of the first revelation had not entirely perished among them.
>
> We have much to learn in speaking to them gently; for I perceive that the light of the Gospel finds a reflection already shining within their souls.

(End of excerpt, Relation of 1637, Paul Le Jeune, S.J.)

Archival Reference:

Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents, Vol. 11, “Relation of 1637,” pp. 19–21. Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed. Cleveland: Burrows Brothers, 1896.

Summary (for metadata use):

Early Jesuit correspondence acknowledging that Indigenous peoples of New France professed belief in a single Creator, described as “the Master above the Sky,” long before formal Christian instruction.

Subject Tags:

- Jesuit Missions — New France — 17th Century
- Indigenous Theology — Concept of God
- Catholic Church — Evangelization and Cross-Cultural Encounter
- Montagnais and Algonquin Spiritual Traditions